

Active dialogue with citizens on Europe

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The European Parliament adopted by 529 votes to 90, with 46 abstentions, a resolution on active dialogue with citizens on Europe, in response to the Commission Communication entitled 'Debate Europe – building on the experience of Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate' (Plan D).

The resolution recalls that a democratic and transparent European Union will require an enhanced dialogue between citizens and the European institutions, including the Parliament, but also an ongoing debate on Europe at European, national and local level.

Increasing interest in European issues: the Parliament recalls that surveys show that the less educated and less affluent a Union citizen is, the more likely he or she will be to oppose further European integration, which indicates that the European idea, in spite of all previous efforts, mainly reaches the well-educated, wealthy segment of European society. It regrets the fact that, in spite of the Commission's efforts and good ideas, the success achieved in increasing Union citizens' level of knowledge and interest in European issues has been very limited, something which was, regrettably, evidenced by the Irish referendum. The Parliament therefore stresses the importance of **creating cohesive communication links with targeted content** both between the EU and the regions with particular characteristics and between the EU and particular social groups.

Institutional aspects: the resolution stresses the need to complete the ratification process of the Treaty of Lisbon, which will further increase the transparency of the EU and the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. It recalls, in this context, the new opportunities for participatory democracy that the Treaty of Lisbon would provide, especially the **citizens' initiative**.

Consulting citizens: MEPs stress the importance and value of the consultation process as an effective tool in empowering citizens by enabling them to input directly into the policy process at EU level. The Commission is called upon to take further steps to disseminate information in time on future EU consultations via the media and other appropriate forums at national, regional and local levels.

MEPs call on the **Commission and Parliament representations** in Member States to improve cooperation when it comes to consulting citizens by providing opportunities for voters to meet MEPs elected in different countries and EU officials. The three main institutions are invited to consider the possibility of holding **joint open debates** that would supplement Parliament's open debates, addressing topics that concern consumers and their daily lives and thereby strengthening their confidence in the internal market and consumer protection.

Going local: the Parliament calls on the Commission to extend its dialogue to all levels by adapting its message to different **target groups** according to their social backgrounds. It proposes the creation of a **permanent, interactive communication system** between the EU institutions and citizens, with regular campaigns of a local and regional nature by the EU, the assistance of the regional media and the active participation of civil society, NGOs, chambers of commerce, trade unions and professional organisations.

At the same time, the Commission is called upon to launch **local, small-scale communication campaigns** with the involvement of local actors, and to promote activities enabling citizens to be better informed about immigrants' countries of origin and, equally, to better inform immigrants of the rights and duties attached to EU citizenship.

Education, media and ICT: the Parliament stresses the importance of introducing European politics and history into the school curricula of each Member State so as to strengthen European values, and of developing the European Studies departments within university programmes. It calls on the Commission to provide financial support for the promotion of these projects.

The resolution welcomes the Commission Communication of 21 December 2007 which sets out clear objectives as to how the Europa website can be turned into a **service-oriented web 2.0 site**. It urges the Commission to complete construction of the new site as early as 2009. The new website should provide a forum for citizens to share their opinions and participate in online polls, where all NGOs, public institutions and individuals may share their experiences of their EU communication projects. The Commission should make better use of the audiovisual material available on Europe by Satellite by establishing links with local television channels and community media. The Europe Direct network should also be further publicised.

MEPs call on the Commission to strengthen its coordination efforts in the fields of **consumer education and information** by increasing its financial and human resources. In this regard, the financial and human resources allocated to the European Consumer Centres Network should be increased. MEPs also call for measures to improve the level of financial literacy of consumers, in particular concerning their rights and obligations as well as their means of redress with regard to savings and loans.

The role of women: lastly, the Commission is called upon to promote programmes and campaigns for encouraging women's social, political, and cultural activeness, taking into account women's role in the dialogue between generations and society's sustainability and prosperity. Girls and women should be given better information on the concept of European citizenship and the rights pertaining thereto and the Commission should include more women in task forces and working groups, engaged with the issues of family life, childcare and education.